

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
MOHAWK'S BEST (STRATEGIC PLANNING) COMMITTEE  
April 14, 2016  
MINUTES**

The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law requires minutes for all school committee and subcommittee meetings. The recorded minutes are open to the public for inspection within 10 days of the meeting. Minutes recorded provide a brief overview that reflects the subject matter discussed and any decisions made. If any motions are made clearly state the motion and indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion. Record who was in favor, opposed, or abstained. The names of any person(s) appearing before the committee are to be indicated.

**Date:** Thursday, April 14, 2016 **Time:** 7:00 p.m. **Place:** Sanderson Academy Cafeteria

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Karen Blom [Buckland]; Willow Cohen [MTRSD School Committee]; Mick Comstock [Heath]; Susan Mitchell [MDEA]; David Newall [Ashfield;]; John, Payne [Shelburne]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont]; Leslie Rule [Plainfield]; Martha Thurber [MTRSD School Committee].

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:** Kim Orzechowski [Hawley]

**School Committee Members in Attendance:** Glenn Cardinal

**School Administration:** Michael Buoniconti

**Others in Attendance:** Laura Stravino [Ashfield parent]

**Documents:**

April 14, 2016, Agenda

April 4, 2016 MTRSD Mohawk's BEST Committee Draft Minutes

**Call to Order:** Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Review and Accept the Minutes of the April 4, 2016 and March 23, 2016 Meetings:**

On a motion by Willow Cohen, seconded by Susan Mitchell, the Mohawk's BEST Committee voted to approve the minutes from the March 16, 2016 meeting. Karen Blum, Susan Mitchell, Kim Orzechowski, Leslie Rule, Erwin Reynolds and David Newall abstained.

On a motion by Susan Mitchell, seconded by Sarah Reynolds, the Mohawk's BEST Committee voted to approve the minutes from the March 23, 2016 meeting. Mick Comstock, and John Payne abstained.

**Citizen Comment:** Citizen comments were accepted throughout the meeting.

Martha Thurber introduced new BEST member Leslie Rule from Plainfield and provided a brief summary of the Committee's structure and activities to date.

**Subgroup Reports:**

**Communications**

Willow Cohen reported on progress related to several initiatives of the Communications Subcommittee:

- School Marketing Flyers – With the help of school Principals and Elementary Curriculum Coordinator Rachel Porter, the text and photos for the 5 school flyers are almost complete. Discussion focused on distribution points (banks, real estate offices, town meetings, libraries, Shelburne Falls Information Center). Several members questioned rather an initial press run of 100 would be enough. Costs for an additional 100 will be considered.
- Press releases about school events – Paul Cohen has created a standard press release format; the issue is who should be responsible for developing releases and on what topics. Martha Thurber reiterated

her view that a central point/person be assigned to vet all releases prior to distribution and to serve as the contact person for those seeking additional information. Willow Cohen asked about the possibility of someone in school administration taking that on. Superintendent Buoniconti said there was no money available to pay even a part time person. It was then suggested that perhaps this would be good experience for a student interested in journalism/communications. Superintendent Buoniconti will discuss this with Principal Lynn Dole.

- School Facebook pages – The Subcommittee continues to work on content/security issues. Superintendent Buoniconti will follow up with Mohawk’s tech director about this and about various ideas for revamping Mohawk’s overall website.

### **Grants/Revenues**

- Susan Mitchell and Sarah Reynolds reported that they continue to work with Curriculum Coordinators Rachel Porter and Sarah Jetzon and the Mary Lyon Foundation to identify and vet grant opportunities and matching those opportunities to specific needs/curriculum options at District schools. The crowd-funding page to support the purchase of Chromebooks for Mohawk students has raised over \$5,000 to date.

### **Transportation**

David Newell reported that his subcommittee will meet with the Mohawk/Hawlemont Transportation Subcommittee on April 25 at 5 pm begin to analyze current transportation routes and potential alternative options. Superintendent Buoniconti noted that part of the transportation effort will be to get agreement from the state to hold the District “harmless” with respect to Ch. 71 transportation aid, as it currently does for Ch. 70 school aid. This would be additional incentive for the District to look for ways to save on transportation.

### **Finance/Facilities**

Martha Thurber reported on several options that the Facilities & Finance Subcommittee had agreed appeared worth significant financial and educational review. These share a number of similarities, including:

- Integrate Grade 6 with Grades 7/8.
- Keep pre-K at all existing schools
- Assign children to elementary schools based on geography, not town lines
- Work with towns to find/fund ways to repurpose unused school spaces (senior center, town offices, town library, business incubator space, etc.
- Create expanded curriculum options/opportunities at all levels

Martha Thurber also noted that these had been presented for initial discussion at the BEST Education Subcommittee meeting with the District Leadership Team (DLT) earlier in the day.

### **Potential Ideas Consistent with These Options**

- Keep pre-K only at existing schools and move all elementary grades to BSE
- Keep some combination of pre-K to Grade(s) 1, 2 or 3 at existing elementary schools, moving the balance to BSE or BSE/Sanderson, depending upon number of grades and students
- Move Grades 6-8 to BSE as a true middle school. Distribute Grades pre-K to 5 to all other existing elementary buildings. Utilize the current MS wing at Mohawk for enhanced HS programming, e.g., a “college/high school” offering college courses in conjunction with an area college, and/or PBL-based career-oriented programs
- Build a new central elementary school on the existing Mohawk campus and move all K-5 students to the new building. Threshold issues with respect to this option include: Availability of town/MSBA financing for new construction? Willingness of parents to have younger children transported to Mohawk campus?
- Invite Hawlemont into the District; retain on Pre-K at Colrain and Heath and redistribute all K-5 to BSE, Sanderson, Hawlemont based on geography.

These ideas generated considerable discussion.

- Susan Mitchell said she was intrigued by the idea of a separate 6-8 middle school at BSE.
- Kate Barrows and Karen Blum questioned whether these ideas actually generate savings to towns or simply shift costs. Sarah Reynolds said yes, there would be savings to towns, especially if re-use of

buildings generated rental income. Superintendent Buoniconti said there also could be savings generated through sharing of services (such as custodian, nursing, maintenance) with public or private owners of the re-purposed spaces.

Sarah Reynolds noted that it was important to also keep a focus on the educational enrichment that could be offered as a result of larger building enrollment and associated efficiencies.

- Glenn Cardinal suggested that the “collegiate HS” concept would potentially help attract/retain students.
- Leslie Rule noted that parents are generally looking for more innovative, “authentic” educational programs for their children. We need to show that there are differences between what an urban/suburban schools can offer and what a rural school can offer in this regard. Rural schools can offer more opportunities for “outside” learning and results-oriented civic engagement.
- Erwin Reynolds expressed the need to deeply involve parents in determining the focus of innovative programming.
- Karen Blum said there must be bottom-line savings associated with closing buildings. Superintendent Buoniconti said his analysis, both in prior years and currently, indicated that operational savings from building closings were not as substantial as most believed. The real savings come from consolidating classrooms and staffing in educationally appropriate ways. He also noted that any change would need to be phased, with time to consider the impacts. David Newell noted that buildings could be “mothballed” (as the old Charlemont HS building was) rather than renovated immediately.

Discussion then turned to the best way to proceed with getting additional public input on these ideas. Martha Thurber noted that the DLT had advised against a “press release” announcement of options, noting that what the BEST Committee needs is input on concepts, rather than simply reaction (good or bad). Consequently, Ms. Thurber said she was disinclined to make any major announcement at this point. The group agreed that it would be important to get input from elementary parents (Grades 3-5) regarding the concept of moving 6<sup>th</sup> grade to Mohawk.

#### **Next Steps:**

#### **Other:**

Sarah Reynolds noted that Charlemont is hosting a “Small Town Summit” on Thursday, May 5 at 7pm. The objective is to get small, rural towns in the area together to discuss common issues.

**Schedule Next Meeting:** The next meeting was scheduled for Wed., April 20 at 7 p.m. at Mohawk. (Note: Subsequent to the meeting, it was learned that it would be impossible to legally post for such a meeting in a timely fashion because of the Patriot’s Day holiday. The meeting was rescheduled for Thursday, April 21 at 7 p.m. at Mohawk.)

**Adjournment:** On a motion by Willow Cohen, seconded by Sarah Reynolds, the Subcommittee voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber